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RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH PRIORITY 0696
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY 1073
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RHMPFISS/COMSOCEUR VAHINGEN GE PRIORITY
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STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

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NSC FOR NEA STAFF

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HO USAF FOR X0XX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

[1](#)1. Mideast

[1](#)2. Iran

Key stories in the media:

Major media led with a possible resumption of the cease-fire with Hamas. HaQaretz quoted a senior Hamas official as saying in a published interview that his organization would be willing to renew its cease-fire with Israel without adding any new conditions. Yediot quoted senior security officials who say that they have discerned in the last two days what appears to be a change of heart in Hamas's attitude towards a possible truce, citing as evidence the decrease in rocket fire -- six Qassam rockets yesterday out of the Gaza Strip. However, over 60 missiles landed in Israel overnight and this morning. HaQaretz reported that Israel, for its part, agreed to open the border today to allow food and medicine to enter Gaza, after days in which the crossings have been closed due to the ongoing rocket fire from Gaza. Israel Radio reported that DM Ehud Barak ordered not to transfer the goods today because of a volley of rockets and mortar shells that fell on Netivot and the south of Ashkelon this morning. The Jerusalem Post reported that yesterday Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak promised PA President Mahmoud Abbas that he will step his efforts to renew the cease-fire. The newspaper also reported that Mubarak is expected to warn FM Tzipi Livni against a major military operation in Gaza when the two meet in Cairo tomorrow. Maariv reported that cabinet ministers, former Shin Bet heads, reserve generals, and senior defense officials are calling upon the government to bring about the release of Gilad Shalit in any cease-fire negotiations.

Media reported that three terrorists, who laid bombs at the Israel-Gaza border yesterday, were killed by IDF forces. Israel Radio reported that In the Khan Yunis region in southern Gaza, two Hamas operatives were killed in the explosion of a bomb that they were preparing.

HaQaretz quoted FM Livni as saying yesterday that Damascus must take concrete steps to ensure any peace deal signed by Israel is worth more than just the paper it is written on. The newspaper also reported that senior State Department officials sent concerned messages to their Israeli counterparts in recent months regarding the negative effects an Israel-Syria peace deal could have on Lebanese sovereignty. "Don't sell Lebanon to the Syrians," American officials reportedly wrote. The Jerusalem Post quoted a senior GOI sources as saying yesterday that Turkey is keen on putting a "Q mechanism" in place that would make direct Syrian-Israeli talks

possible before the February 10 Israeli elections. The source was quoted as saying that the idea was to have a framework up and working prior to the changing of the guard in the U.S. and Israel.

Yediot and other media reported that Likud Chairman Benjamin Netanyahu is moving to an unrealistic spot on the Likud list Effie Eitam, a right-wing leader who has left politics, in exchange for 12 million shekels (around \$3.13 million) in his electoral budget.

Maariv reported that, following the security forcesQ raid on farm of her father, Far-right activist Noam Federman, Yaska Federman has become the first right-wing conscious objector.

HaQaretz reported that yesterday President Bush granted a pardon posthumously to Charles Winters, a non-Jewish Amerian who broke the law to supply aircraft to Jews fighting in Israel's 1948 War of Independence.

Yesterday the leading Internet news service Ynet reported that an IDF soldier has been arrested for allegedly firing his gun during settler riots in Hebron.

Globes reported that the American firm Hrmonic has bought the Israeli company Scopus, whch is developing systems to transfer digital video data, for \$80 million. Globes and Israel Radio quoted Teva Pharmaceutical Industries Ltd. as saying yesterday that it completed its \$7.5 billion buyout of the American generic drug manufacturer Barr Pharmaceuticals Inc.

I. Mideast:

Summary:

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: QOutgoing Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's efforts to advance peace talks with Syria are praiseworthy -- even if they are unlikely to lead to a diplomatic agreement within the current government's few remaining weeks in office.

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: QWhen it comes to bilateral relations between Israel and Syria, however, it is hard to lend credence to Olmert's efforts, especially with Israel in the midst of an election campaign.

The ultra-Orthodox Hamodiqa editorialized: QThis is about a prime minister with a legal hunchback, who lends a hand to an Arab leader who belongs -Q at least for now -Q to terrorist IslamQs Qaxis of Evil.'

Senior diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in HaQaretz (12/24): QInstead of wasting time in futile polemics with Damascus, Israel can recommend arbitration.

Block Quotes:

I. "Paving the Way"

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (12/24): QOutgoing Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's efforts to advance peace talks with Syria are praiseworthy -- even if they are unlikely to lead to a diplomatic agreement within the current government's few remaining weeks in office. Olmert has managed to revive the Syrian track after eight years of stagnation, and will leave his successors an active negotiating framework, via Turkish mediation. His achievement is particularly remarkable given Israel's two military confrontations in the north during his term: the Second Lebanon War, fought against Syria's ally Hezbollah, and Israel's bombing of a Syrian reactor in the summer of 2007. In both cases, Israel enjoyed international support and Syria, seeking to extricate itself from its international isolation, was forced to swallow its pride after the destruction of its reactor and renew diplomatic contacts. Olmert also risked a disagreement with the administration of U.S. President George W. Bush, who opposes talks with the Syrians. In recent months, Olmert has made it clear that he will try to advance the diplomatic process until his last day in office. Thus he has tried to preempt claims that as a resigning prime minister, he cannot legitimately conduct peace talks and must not Qtie the hands of the next governmentQ through understandings with the Palestinians or the Syrians. Olmert is acting within his authority, and on the assumption that he will not obtain an agreement, his moves do not obligate his successors, but they will make it easier for them to enter the diplomatic process.

II. "The Assad-Olmert QDialogueQ"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (12/24): QWhen it comes to bilateral relations between Israel and Syria, however, it is hard to lend credence to Olmert's efforts, especially with Israel in the midst of an election campaign.... He should have stressed that irrevocable strategic concessions by Israel on the Golan could only be justified -- for the overwhelming majority of Israelis - in return for a true opening of genuine peaceful relations. Last April, though, Assad said that he would not QimposeQ normalization with Israel on the Syrian people. If Assad hasn't changed his mind about this, why isn't Olmert taking him to task?.... Even Arab observers are interpreting Assad's chatter about direct talks with Israel as intended to mislead President-elect Barack Obama into believing Damascus genuinely seeks peace. If so, Assad is following a well-thumbed Syrian script -- feigning moderation while stoking violence, unwilling to pay the price of peace yet anxious not to be ostracized for his intransigence. Assad's approach is already paying off with some EU countries. Our question is: Why should Ehud Olmert be smoothing his path?

III. "Diplomatic Coercion"

The ultra-Orthodox Hamodiqa editorialized (12/24): QThe energetic activity of the interim Prime Minister, to seal initial agreements with the Syrian ruler, is inconsistent with diplomatic integrity.

If President Assad tries to receive from an interim prime minister what he knows he won't get from a permanent prime minister, there is no doubt that this is a diplomatic transgression. Assad apparently knows the truth: This is about a prime minister with a legal hunchback, who lends a hand to an Arab leader who belongs -Q at least for now -Q to terrorist IslamQs Qaxis of Evil.'

IV. "Arbitration Now"
Senior diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in HaQaretz (12/24): QNow is the time to consider a new path [on the Syrian track]. Instead of wasting time in futile polemics with Damascus, Israel can recommend arbitration. The talks would last a few years, during which progress on other matters involved in a peace deal could be made and Syrian credibility tested. Israel would then be portrayed as a country respecting international rule of law and win valuable public relations points. Syria's refusal based on the Qholding our groundQ rationale would present its president, Bashar Assad, as a refusenik of peace and Israel as righteous among the nations. International arbitration has a successful precedent in the Israel-Egypt peace process, in which the two sides transferred the issue of Taba to review. Unlike the usual outcome today, the matter was resolved in Israel's favor. In return for giving up the small town on the Gulf of Aqaba, which was never Israel's, it received territories in the central Negev and changes to the maritime border near Eilat. And disputes over the exact border route did not disrupt the deal being signed or carried out.

52. Iran:

Summary:

Diplomatic correspondent Barak Ravid wrote in the independent, left-leaning HaQaretz: QIsraeli officials are hoping that Barack Obama's presidency will Qrouse the world from its sleep.

Block Quotes:

"The Sanctions Are Not Working"

Diplomatic correspondent Barak Ravid wrote in the independent, left-leaning HaQaretz (12/24): QFor more than a decade, Israel has been trying to isolate Iran and push international sanctions against Tehran in a bid to keep it from going nuclear. But now that Iran is slightly more than a year away from crossing the technological threshold that will allow it to become a nuclear power, according to IDF Intelligence, the sanctions appear to be dying. The only point of light on the Iran issue is the drop in oil prices and the global financial crisis, say Israeli government officials. In addition to being disappointed with Russia's conduct regarding the missiles, Israel is also concerned about continued Russian assistance with Iran's construction of its nuclear facility in Bushehr, and Russia's indifference to the advanced state of Iran's nuclear program.... But Russia isn't the only country with unwelcome news. Israeli officials were eager to hear details about Germany's reported plan for stronger sanctions against Iran, but when a German Foreign Office official arrived in Israel, he said it was only an idea so far, and wouldn't get off the ground for at least six months. Worse still was the situation in Spain last week, where Foreign Minister Miguel Moratinos rolled out the red carpet for Mehdi Safari, Iran's deputy foreign minister for European affairs, and said Spain wanted to improve ties with Iran. But for all the international indifference to Iran's nuclear aspirations, some Israeli officials are looking on the bright side.... Israeli officials are hoping that Barack Obama's presidency will Qrouse the world from its sleep. Despite some concern over the dialogue Obama is expected to hold with Tehran, Israeli government officials see the predicted failure of those talks as providing international legitimacy for far tougher steps against Iran.

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